

Eastern States Paralyzed by Fierce Storm

The Great Blizzard Hit 100 Years Ago

By Marcor Cross
National Geographic News

A century later, people still talk about the Great Blizzard of 1888, the cataclysmic storm that struck the East Coast from Maine to Maryland, taking more than 400 lives and causing damage that would have totaled billions in today's dollars.

The unpredictable March blizzard, caused by the dramatic collision of two massive weather fronts, affected one-fourth of the nation's population and cut off many of its largest cities, including New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington.

One of the first comprehensive reports on the causes and effects of the gigantic storm was published in the original issue of National Geographic magazine in October of 1888. Accompanied by colored meteorological charts, the article combined scientific explanation with dramatic accounts of a few of the 200 vessels blown ashore, sunk, damaged or abandoned.

Because of its size and the ferocity with which the storm hit it, New York City was the center of attention. About 200 people died there alone. Legends of bravery and tragedy started growing before the 30-foot snowdrifts had melted.

Usually overlooked, however, is another devastating blizzard that preceded the eastern one by two months in a broad area of the Midwest, laying low thousands of homesteaders. One estimate of the death toll is 109, but others believe that count is low because of the area's widely scattered population and scant communications.

The January, 1888, storm is sometimes called the "schoolchildren's blizzard." It struck so suddenly that numerous children and their teachers were stranded overnight in bleak schoolhouses in, for example, Nebraska and the Dakota Territory.

The midwesterners have their own brand of blizzard legends of heroism and of death by freezing. Many of the stories involve teachers and pupils.

In Nebraska, one of the best-remembered heroines was a teenage teacher named Minnie May Freeman. When the wind ripped a hole in the roof of her schoolhouse at Ord, she herded her 16 charges, frostbitten but safe, to her nearby boarding house.

Lois May Royce, a teacher at Plainview, Neb., wasn't so fortunate. Attempting to lead her three small pupils 200 yards to her dwelling, she got lost in the blinding snow. The three children died. Both of Miss Royce's frozen feet had to be amputated, and one arm was permanently disabled.

In New York City, perhaps the most famous blizzard victim was Roscoe Conkling, lawyer, former U.S. senator, and prospective presidential candidate.

Unable to get a taxicab, the 58-year-old Conkling set out on foot from his Wall Street office for his club on 25th Street. It took him three hours to shoulder his way through the drifts. Arriving at the club, he crashed exhausted to the floor of its entrance. As a result of his ordeal, he developed pneumonia and mastoiditis and died the next month.

Both of the immense storms caught large sections of the United States unawares. Both followed mild weather, leaving people unprepared for the sudden, violent change. More than 30 years would pass before commercial radio would broadcast storm warnings.

"I don't know that we would have automatically predicted the blizzard of '88 any better," said Murray Mitchell of McLean, Va., a retired climatologist for the federal government. Even modern forecasters, with vastly more sophisticated equipment, occasionally can be fooled, he admits.

Many of the places affected by the 1888 storms have recorded deeper snow, colder winds, and lower temperatures. But what made both of those blizzards historic was the intense combination of those three elements.

One expert has written that hydrologists would describe the 1888 eastern blizzard as a "400-

year storm," a meteorological event of such magnitude that it could be expected to occur on the average of once every four centuries. Others have called it a "100-year storm." The same terms would apply to the western blizzard.

That doesn't necessarily mean we're due for a repeat performance. "Weather comes in clusters," Mitchell says. "It's not uncommon to find two extreme events coming within a few days or weeks or years of each other."

The Great Blizzard of the East bequeathed some lasting benefits. An unknown number of New Yorkers found themselves stranded aboard windblown elevated trains. Their plight helped lead to the construction of subways there and in other cities.

Telephone and telegraph poles toppled like tenpins during the eastern howler, cutting off President Cleveland and everybody

else in the nation's capital from outside communication. As a result, many cables have since been buried underground.

Forever etched on the memories of survivors, both 1888 blizzards inspired the organization of blizzard clubs for the purpose of swapping reminiscences. After gathering regularly since 1927, the New York City group ceased meeting in 1973.

On Jan. 12, at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, the January 12th 1888 Blizzard Club, organized in 1940, had its final meeting. With all its survivors gone, it depends on their descendants and history buffs for its sparse annual attendance.

But devotees aren't giving up. One descendant says she hopes the meetings will continue under a new name: the 1949 Blizzard Club. That was the winter of another dandy storm, one worthy of its own reminiscences.

Listen Veteran

By Edward C. Balthasar
State Veteran Counselor

The week of Feb. 8-14, 1988 has been designated "National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans Week."

Thomas E. Zamary, director of the Buffalo Regional Office of the Veterans Administration, encourages the public to salute those who served our country by visiting hospitalized veterans. Groups from schools, churches and civic organizations are especially encouraged to visit health care facilities and help those veterans to realize they are still an important part of the community.

For assistance with benefits for veterans, contact or visit the VA Office at the Livingston County Campus in Mt. Morris.

Classified Ads Work



JOSEPH PRAGLE
Airman Completes Basic Training

Airman Joseph A. Pragle, son of Eugene and Anita Pragle of 4 East Ave., Wayland has graduated from Air Force basic training at Lackland AFB, Tex.

During the six weeks of training the airman studied the Air Force mission, organization and customs and received special training in human relations. In addition, airmen who complete basic training earn credits toward an associate degree through the community college of the Air Force. He is a 1981 graduate of Wayland Central School.

The World Almanac

DATE BOOK

Feb. 11, 1988

Today is the 42nd day of 1988 and the 52nd day of winter.

TODAY'S HISTORY: On this day in 1809, Robert Fulton received a patent for the steamboat.

TODAY'S BIRTHDAYS: Thomas Edison (1847); Max Baer (1909); Lloyd Bentsen (1912); Burt Reynolds (1936)

TODAY'S QUOTE: "The inventor tries to meet the demand of a crazy civilization" — Thomas Edison.

TODAY'S MOON: Day after last quarter.

TODAY'S TRIVIA: Which state did Lloyd Bentsen serve as U.S. senator? (a) Texas (b) Ohio (c) Louisiana

TODAY'S BARBS BY PHIL PASTORET
We'd love to tell you about the marvelous memory-aid book we just read — but we can't recall the title.

Why do they always stock only the size larger and the size smaller than yours?

TODAY'S TRIVIA ANSWER: (a) Sen. Lloyd Bentsen represented the state of Texas. © 1988 NEWSPAPER ENTERPRISE ASSN.

BIKINI

The two-piece swimsuit, explains "The Second Kids' World Almanac" explains, was nicknamed the bikini as a result of the shock it caused when it was introduced. Bikini is the name of an atoll in the Pacific Ocean where the atomic bomb was tested, starting in 1946.

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BOOSTS PROJECT — Assemblyman John W. Hasper (right) tours the Caledonia Fish Hatchery with Donald Longacre, hatchery director. Hasper is sponsoring a four-year \$20 million program to restore New York's aging fish hatchery facilities. The Caledonia facility is the oldest in the nation, built in 1870, and would receive \$2 million in the first year for necessary repairs.



Given these prices, we're predicting a heat wave in February.

Winter doesn't have to be cold. Because Vermont Castings is making it easier than ever to own one of America's finest woodstoves. For instance, buy any 36-inch woodstove and get back \$150. Purchase any Radiant, Defiant, Intrepid, or Fireplace Insert and receive \$100. But hurry. This is a limited time offer. After Feb. 11, it'll be months before things heat up like this again.

The Vermont Castings February Rebate.

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